

For immediate release
February 9, 2001

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Rapid Response Team activated to aid Montgomery Ward's employees

JOPLIN, Mo. -- The state Rapid Response Team has been activated to help workers that will be dislocated by the closing of Montgomery Ward Co.'s at the Northpark Mall in Joplin, Mo.

The Rapid Response Team, composed of representatives from the Department of Economic Development's (DED) Division of Workforce Development (DWD), the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and the Workforce Investment Board in southwest Missouri, responds to the needs of workers who have lost or will lose their jobs by providing special training and re-employment services.

Joseph L. Driskill, director of the Department of Economic Development, has directed DWD to assist Montgomery Ward's employees by offering Missouri Career Center services.

"The state offers many free services to assist individuals who have been laid off to find new employment opportunities," said DED Director Joseph L. Driskill. "It's important that Missourians know where to seek help in this unfortunate situation."

The Rapid Response Team and the local Missouri Career Center will provide immediate services to workers needing assistance, including assessment and testing, career counseling and resume writing, interviewing skills, job search methods, on-the-job training and tuition assistance for vocational training or education.

Representatives from DWD and the Workforce Investment Board in southwest Missouri are working with the company to ensure that workers have access to these free services. Meetings will be held with these individuals at 8:30 and 10 a.m. and 1 and 2:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 13 at the company's store to explain how these services can help them find a new job.

Montgomery Ward & Co.'s announced in late December that it had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. The company employs more than 750 individuals across Missouri, mostly in Kansas City, with other stores located in Jefferson City, Springfield, St. Joseph, and Joplin. The closing of the Joplin store will result in the lay off approximately 100 employees.

"It's difficult to see Montgomery Ward's -- a company that invented the mail-order business -- close its doors after more than 100 years in business," said Driskill. "It may be difficult for the state's slowing economy to quickly recover from the loss of these retail sector jobs. The Jasper County unemployment rate still remains below 3 percent however, which may be conducive to helping these individuals find employment soon."

Employers interested in hiring Montgomery Ward's workers can call **1-800-877-8698**.

Since 1983 -- when Missouri's dislocated worker program was established -- more than 100,000 dislocated workers have participated in the program. Approximately 80 percent of the people assisted by the program find new employment.

Laid-off workers interested in the training and re-employment services offered through the Rapid Response Team can call **DWD at 1-800-877-8698 or the WIB in southwest Missouri at 417/629-3000**.



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